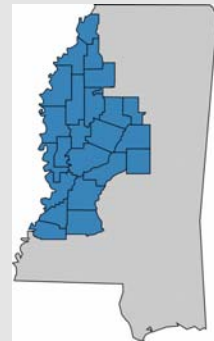




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House Select Committee on Homeland Security

Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness and Response  
and the  
Subcommittee on Intelligence and Counterterrorism

“Does the Homeland Security Act of 2002 give the Department the  
Tools it Needs to Determine Which Bio-Warfare Threats are Most  
Serious?”

June 5, 2003, 2:00 p.m.

2318 Rayburn House Office Building

Congressman Bennie G. Thompson (MS)

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June 5, 2003

Mr. Chairman, thank you for your cooperation in allowing this hearing to move forward today. Mr. Tolbert, I know that we have made prior attempts to get you before the Committee. It is a pleasure to finally have you with us. Mr. Redmond it is a pleasure to have you before the Committee as well. Gentlemen, in order for this Committee to do its job effectively and provide the necessary to assist the Department in its duties, it is absolutely essential that this Committee be able to engage DHS and have real discussions and an exchange of ideas. After all, we both have the same goal of securing America in mind. It is my hope that today's hearing will be productive and that we can begin to have some constructive dialogue so that Congress can do its job better.

I want to begin by commending you on your efforts thus far to secure America. There is no doubt in my mind that operations like TOPOFF2 and similar drills are necessary - and if successful, can significantly enhance our nation's preparedness and ability to respond to potential terrorist attacks, but today I want address preparedness at its most basic level.

Gentlemen, in the coming weeks this Committee will be tasked with marking up the “BioShield” legislation. I have said in previous statements that I believe that “Project BioShield” is a worthwhile project that will hopefully aid this nation in rapidly transferring technology into products that can be used to protect individuals against biological and chemical agents used weapons of mass destruction. However, I don't think that this Committee can in good faith put its

mark on this legislation, unless and until we have the relevant information at our disposal that can help us decide exactly what vaccines are needed and in what quantity.

The entire premise of this country going to war with Iraq was that we needed to rid this rouge nation of weapons of mass destruction, be they nuclear, biological, or chemical. Reluctantly, this country sent soldiers into harms way to achieve this goal. Today the war is over. Saddam is out of power. However, to this date, no weapons of mass destruction have been discovered.

In my mind this can only mean one of two things: 1) The Administration fabricated Iraq's WMD capacity and we sent our brave men and women into war on false pretenses; or 2) These weapons did and still do exist, but they have fallen into the hands of other rouge nations neighboring Iraq or terrorists.

If the latter scenario is indeed the case, then that makes your job at DHS and our job on the Committee that conducts Department oversight extremely important. If we are to succeed in our mission to secure America we must have your cooperation. This Committee cannot be absolutely sure that the Department has the tools its need to address threats lurking out there unless we know exactly the nature and significance of the threats that the Department believes exist. Bottom line, if this Congress is going to approve taxpayers' dollars to be used to assist with the development of "BioShield", we need to know what vaccines to spend money on, and in light of the current threats posed to this country, we also need to know what information the Department's assessment of need is based on. So today, the Members of this Committee may ask some very real questions. It is my hope that we will get some real answers. Once again gentlemen, it is a pleasure to have you join us today. I look forward to your testimony and the opportunity to ask you a couple of questions.